



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

Charles A. Zingler  
Commissioner

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November 20, 2024

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin  
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Craig Crenshaw  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Don Scott  
Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas  
President Pro Tempore, Senate of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

### ***Delivered via electronic mail***

Re: 2024 Overview of the Activities of the Virginia Military Spouse Liaison

Dear Governor Youngkin, Secretary Crenshaw, Delegate Scott, and Senator Lucas:

The Code of Virginia, §2.2-2004 (18) directs that the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) provide an overview of the activities of the Military Spouse Liaison, as outlined in the Code of Virginia § 2.2-2002.2, including any legislative recommendations, on or before December 1 of each year to the Governor, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, and the General Assembly.

Ms. Kayla LaFond serves as the Department's Military Spouse Liaison (MSL) and leads DVS Military Spouse (MilSpouse) programs and initiatives. The MSL advocates for military spouses across the Commonwealth by conducting outreach, research, identifying barriers, and creating pathways for spouses to find meaningful employment in Virginia. The Military Spouse Liaison gives a voice to military spouses within the Commonwealth to make Virginia the most veteran and military spouse friendly state in the nation.

This year, one of the program's primary objectives was help with internal DVS processes to attract military spouses to state employment and identify certified Virginia Values Veterans (V3)

companies as being military spouse friendly. One of these accomplishments is that DVS became a Department of Defense (DoD) Military Spouse Employment Partner (MSEP), only the second Virginia state agency to do so. By being a MSEP, DVS has access to a free system to recruit military spouses and a DoD-vetted resource for the Spouse Ambassador Network in which the MSL can now participate.

The second objective for the MilSpouse program was to promote resources, referrals, and information available to military spouses at events, community engagement meetings, and one-on-one interactions. Areas of focus in FY24 were childcare, licensure reciprocity, and employment.

Of the many activities and efforts conducted by the MSL this year, a few are highlighted here:

- The MSL attended the Association of Defense Communities *Installation Innovation Forum* in Orlando, Florida in November 2023. At the forum, the MSL was part of a panel discussion with the Washington State Military Spouse Liaison (Virginia's counterpart) and Alabama Military Family Liaison (a LT Governor initiative). The liaisons highlighted their positions, accomplishments, and call to action for more states to create similar positions. There were approximately 70 participants that included leaders from veterans groups and the military, community organizations, and employers.
- Collaborated with the V3 program to conduct the first military spouse-focused employer survey. This survey was sent to over 3,000 certified employers to identify the employers that are going above and beyond in hiring military-connected spouses to include formal partnerships with the Department of Defense, Employee Resource Groups, and spouse hiring preferences.
- During Alaska's General Assembly Session, the MSL provided insight into Virginia's MilSpouse program to help make changes to an upcoming Alaska House Bill to create a similar role, the Military Spouse Help Desk, within the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. In February, the MSL provided virtual testimony for an edit to the proposed legislation to make a line item more generic to allow more flexibility in creating pathways to successful spouse employment opportunities.
- In April, the MSL identified military-connected spouses employed by DVS through an optional survey. The purpose of the survey was to create a baseline of DVS staff who identify as a military-connected spouse and to show appreciation on Military Spouse Appreciation Day in May. The MSL also provided remarks at the first Military Spouse Appreciation Day pinning ceremony at the Jones & Cabacoy Veteran Care Center (JCVCC) in Virginia Beach and pinned 14 military-connected spouse staff members with the first *Virginia Military Spouse* lapel pin.
- Provided opening remarks at *Hiring Our Heroes Amplify* events in Hampton and Virginia Beach. These two-day employment events were tailored for military spouses and focused on career preparation, professional development, and networking. In addition to the Amplify events, the MSL has presented position and DVS overviews at the Langley Spouse Transition Too quarterly workshops, Northern Virginia Total Military Community

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Alliance, and a joint leadership meeting with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs and DVS.

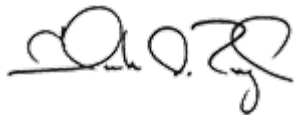
- In March, the MSL was on the *Crucial Convo* panel discussion, *Five and Thrive – Advocates for Change (Part 2)*, moderated by Ms. Sharene Brown, co-founder of Five and Thrive and spouse of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General CQ Brown, Jr., USAF. The MSL was joined by representatives from Hiring Our Heroes, Department of Defense (DoD) Defense State Liaison Office (DSLO), and the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs. The panel discussed how states can support the military spouse community, navigating challenges of being a foreign-born military spouse, and quality of life concerns for military families. The panel was conducted virtually and had over 70 participants.
- Participated in three working groups focused on childcare for military families: the Association of Defense Communities (ADC) Childcare Subcommittee, Hampton Roads Military Advisory Council Childcare Subcommittee, and Operation Child Care Project. The ADC Childcare Subcommittee was initiated during the ADC Installation Innovation Forum to focus on the challenges military families face and potential solutions that ADC can champion at the federal level.

During FY 23-24, the MSL proposed legislation for state exemption for DoD regulated Family Childcare Centers (FCC) located on and off military installations. The proposed legislation – HB739 (Sewell) and SB702 (Subramanyam) – passed the 2024 General Assembly session unanimously.

For FY 24-25, the MSL has proposed legislation for the Liaison to become a member of the Early Childhood Care and Education Commission to advocate on behalf of the military families across the Commonwealth.

Please let me know if we may provide additional information.

Sincerely



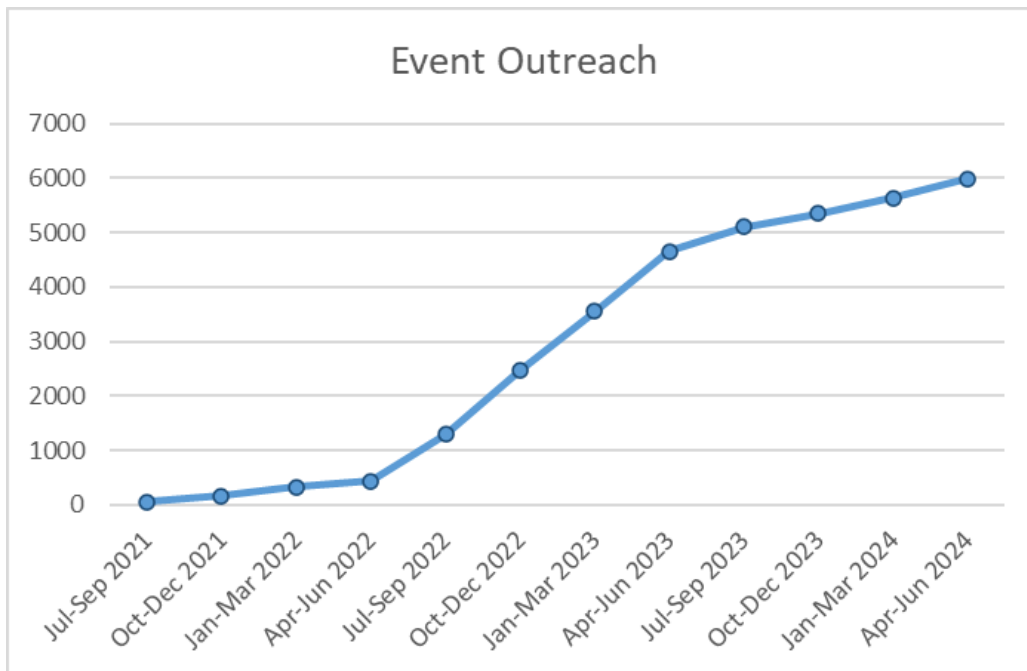
Charles A. Zingler

Cc: Mr. Carl Bedell, Chair, Board of Veterans Services  
Mr. William Aramony, Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

### Appendix 1: Military Spouse Cumulative Metrics



*First newsletter publication was sent in April 2022 for Month of the Military Child with a 35% open rating. Current average open rate is 55%.*



*The first two years were focused on building the milspouse program, connecting to key stakeholders, and establishing networks with Virginia military spouses.*